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SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ AUGUST 2003

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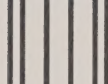
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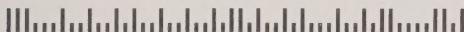
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THREADS OF CHANGE



When Terry Helwig was walking near Lincoln Center in New York City, she had a random thought. She recalls, "Suddenly, I envisioned people around the world tying pieces of thread together." After 9-11, Terry says, "I worried about our world, seemingly hanging by a thread . . . Was one thread enough? Again, I pictured people around the world tying their threads together."

This time Terry acted. She began The Thread Project: One World, One Cloth. In recent months many people have sent threads to her: A college student and her roommates tied together ribbons in their school colors. A novelist tied the shoestrings from her baby shoes to the ribbons from her daughter's baby booties and sent them in belief for the power of "first steps." An Alaskan fisherman tied on fishing line he used to catch salmon in Sitka.

Terry says, "The current plan calls for weaving seven cloths to hang in nations throughout the world.

"What better way to symbolically mend our world than with a thread? The modest thread is an archetype for the genesis of new life, resonating powerfully in the human psyche. From the subatomic Super String Theory of physics to DNA, to the astronomical observations of cluster galaxies forming threadlike filaments, it seems life, as we know it, hangs by threads. Countless creation myths

tell us that the stars, clouds, sun, earth, and moon sprang forth from a heavenly shuttle. Realizing, too, we all slipped into this world, threaded to our mother, one begins to sense that life and thread are close companions.

"If life and threads coalesce, then, perhaps, thread by thread, heart by heart, we can weave a world cloth mighty enough to hold us all."

Terry's vision is tangible, simple, and hopeful. I've sent some thread from a much-loved piece of cotton fabric made by lepers in one of Mother Teresa's communities outside of Calcutta. That it was made by craftspeople, deemed untouchable by some, makes me believe in the power of simple work done with great vision. To participate in the Thread Project, find out more at www.threadproject.com.

Change is also upon us here at Fellowship in Prayer. After twenty years, Paul Walsh, our President and Executive Director, is retiring. In this month's *Questions & Answers*, he looks back and recounts the ideas and practices that have sustained and invigorated his life and faith.

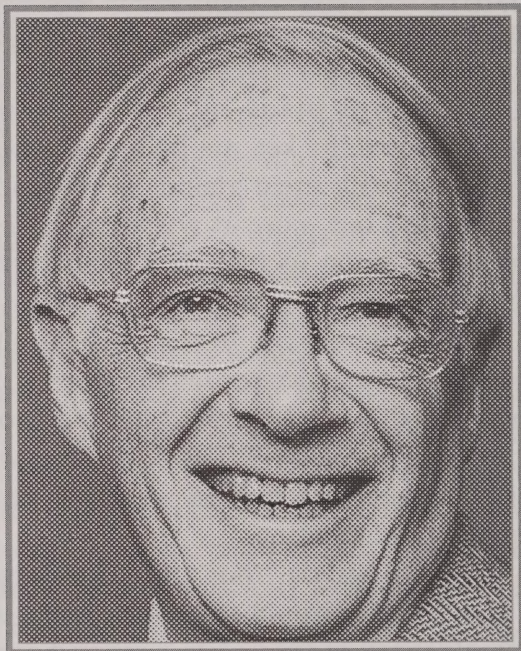
Arthur LeClair, Mercedes Rojas, and Gaylord Hageseth deal in various ways with human weakness and wounds as avenues to understanding.

Nancy Rocereto writes from a favorite retreat center where she learns that spiritual encounter, while wonderful, is not the single mark of God's presence and activity.

Alanna Eckert tells of the growth she has experienced by returning daily to the same chair to write in her journal and pray. Richard Bauman reminds us in "A Body of Gratitude" that we can be thankful for toes and fingers, and elbows and other joints, that mostly work and are pain free most of the time."

Life, it can be said, is like fabric, made up of the multi-colored threads of our days. Tie on. When we weave our lives together, adding what we have, we can remake the world.

Paul Walsh



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Paul Walsh

Paul Walsh and Fellowship in Prayer seem like near synonyms. Since 1988, Paul's steady, guiding presence has set the tone and trajectory for this organization. Under his leadership, Fellowship in Prayer initiated its highly successful Companions on the Sacred Journey conferences, renamed our journal, and opened up our facilities to groups of many differing faith traditions.

After serving as treasurer and then President of Fellowship in Prayer, Paul retired from Princeton University in 1988 to take on the full-time staff position of Executive Director, while continuing as President of the Board of Trustees. A native New Yorker, married with one grown daughter, Paul is a graduate of Princeton University and was a senior vice president and creative director of the Compton Advertising Agency in New York City. He has helped form and lead a number of religious/spiritual organizations and activities in the Princeton area.

After twenty years of service to us all, Paul has decided to retire from the staff position as Executive Director. On behalf of the board, trustees, staff, and readership of Sacred Journey, join with us as we say, "Well done, Paul! Thanks for sharing your wisdom and multiple skills with us. All blessings, Paul, for the coming years."

SACRED JOURNEY: What first compelled you to get involved in Fellowship in Prayer and what has inspired you to continue leading the organization over the years?

Paul Walsh: I had recently come to Princeton, with my wife and young daughter, from Paris, where I had been creative director for the New York advertising agency handling Procter & Gamble products in France.

I was very interested in Eastern “Ways of Liberation” as they were often called then, and in particular in Zen Buddhism. I had devoured Alan Watts, and my teacher was Eido Roshi, who was the abbot of a magnificent monastery in the Catskills that replicated his home monastery in Kyoto.

I started a Zen group at Princeton University, where I was then working as a writer, and I had met and become friends with Paul Griffith, who was the editor, Executive Director, and a trustee of Fellowship in Prayer. Paul asked me to write about meditation for the journal—which was then called Fellowship in Prayer—and I did so.

In preparation, I read through several issues of the journal and was carried away. I was hooked by the idea that individuals, regardless of their faith traditions or beliefs, could help repair the world—and themselves—by praying to that tremendous creative and healing power, or presence, that many of us call God, or ultimate reality. I thought that if I could help share that message, embedded in the experiences of everyday women and men, I would be serving God and our readers.

You’ve had the chance to meet many influential spiritual leaders. Who has had the greatest impact on you and why?

I think that of all the spiritual leaders I have met and talked with, the two who have had the greatest impact on me are Marcus Borg and the Khenpos.

Marcus Borg, the noted Jesus scholar whose books I've practically memorized—*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, for example, transformed me from a non-believer in a religious life of creeds, requirements, and rewards, to a deepening relationship with the Spirit of God. From Marcus I came to understand faith as a way of seeing “the whole” or “what is” as life-giving and nourishing, rather than hostile or indifferent, and belief (the Latin *credo* means “I give my heart to”) as committing oneself to or loving, rather than giving one's mental assent to a set of statements.

The Khenpos—Venerable Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and his younger brother, Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche are Tibetans who escaped from the Chinese invaders of their country and came to teach Tibetan Buddhism in the United States. Their teachings can be complicated and esoteric. But everything they say about how to live in this world boils down to Love, Compassion, and (spiritual) Wisdom, just like all the other major religions. The Khenpos may not be the best at “talking the talk”—I know more than a few people who are far more fluent at “talking the talk”—but whose actions often betray the holiness of their speech.

When it comes to “walking the talk” however, the Khenpos are my role models. If I could be like them—with their joyousness, integrity, love, compassion, and sheer goodness and kindness—I'd feel I was being all that I can be.

You are an avid reader. What books have left a lasting mark on your thinking?

That's a tough one. Much of my thinking about religion/spirituality today undoubtedly comes out of books I have long since forgotten. But I would say that certainly the books written by Marcus Borg that I have read have made it possible for me to read the old and new testaments and other scripture as poetry and metaphor rather than as literal accounts of what happened in that faraway time.

Alan Watts' books on Zen and other Eastern practices were very important to me because they opened up a whole new way of experiencing the world of the Spirit—inside and outside of us. Books by Joseph Campbell and Huston Smith spread out before me the huge range and wondrous variety of ways in which the innate human fear and yearning for a relationship with the Divine has been expressed over the centuries.

Please describe what spiritual practices sustain you.

Prayer and meditation, principally. I don't have a highly devotional temperament. I find that increasingly my prayers are brief prayers of gratitude: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! for finding myself once more alive and awake, for the sight of the lovely deer in my backyard, for the glorious sunset. I do love sung prayer, however—Taize and Gregorian chants and the great religious choral and orchestral music. My wife, Anne, and I hold a monthly Thich Nhat Hanh meeting at our house, which consists mostly of silent meditation. And we usually go to a church or temple service on the weekend: Sunday mass at St. Borromeo; a Shabbat service led by Rabbi Marcia Prager; the Orthodox service at Professor Al



Paul in Fellowship in Prayer's meditation room.

Raboteau's Mother of God church in Rocky Hill, and so on. We find we need regular exposure to a spiritual practice to keep us sane.

If you could sum up your philosophy of life in a phrase or paragraph what would it be?

Oh, dear. I don't know that I have anything as clear-cut as a "philosophy of life." I'm more of a one-day-at-a-time, right here, right now soul. I guess if I were to be formal about it, I'd borrow Rabbi Michael Lerner's words: "At heart, our deepest desire is to realize our oneness with that power, that transcendent reality that is both within us, at the core of our being, and all around us, saturating every part of this sacred universe."

As Fellowship in Prayer moves into a new phase of its organizational life, what would you hope be said of the period of time you served as President and Executive Director?

Well, I hope it would be said that I brought a small, rather unfocused organization with do-good intentions into a position of real prominence in the interfaith—or better, multi-faith—world of the new millennium. We're in a transitional period, as an Irish priest said, "from the experience of authority to the authority of experience," and I hope that Fellowship in Prayer, in the past decade, will be seen to have helped bring about that focus on the value and sacredness of the individual experience of the Divine in the happenings of everyday life.

And what might the future hold for you?

I expect to continue writing, teaching, consulting, and planning and producing spiritual events. When I say "I," I mean my wife and I. Anne is a Jungian analyst, spiritual director, author, and retreat leader, and together we plan to share our combined experience of many years and many teachers and spiritual practices with all who need help or encouragement on this sacred journey we are all traveling.

Thank you Paul, and God bless.

S P I R I T U A L I T Y & E V E R Y D A Y L I F E



A Body of Gratitude

Richard Bauman

It is usually pretty easy for me to remember to be grateful to God for the big things in my life. And it has been equally easy for me to overlook God's generosity in the most common things.

For instance, I have easily overlooked the most familiar thing in my life—something I've had literally for a lifetime—my body. It is always there, always with me. Is there anything I can take more for granted than my body? I doubt it.

Yet Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book, *Who Needs God?* clearly shows how important it is for us to acknowledge God's generosity in giving us wholeness in mind and body. Kushner writes: "The first five minutes of a Jewish daily morning service contain blessings in which I thank God for the fact that:

My mind works and I know it is morning,
My eyes work,
My arms and legs function,
My spinal column works and I can stand upright,
I have clothes to wear,
I have things to look forward to during the day.

Richard Bauman is a freelance writer from West Covina, California who specializes in writing articles on spirituality. This article is excerpted from Awe-full Moments: Spirituality in the Commonplace. It is available online and through major bookstores.

“Without these prescribed blessings, it might not occur to me to be grateful for all those things.”

Until I read those words, I don't think I had ever thanked God for eyes, ears, nose, and mouth that work. I certainly never looked over the various parts of my body and expressed thanksgiving to God for feet and toes and knees and hips that operate properly.

The fact that I have fingers, wrists, elbows, and shoulders that keep functioning day after day, year after year, with virtually no maintenance is, in reality, an awesome miracle. Until I read Kushner's words, I gave my body hardly a thought unless, of course, it was hurting for some reason.

Typically, I have looked at my face and overall physique with little delight, never especially impressed with what I saw. But today I see me differently. Oh sure, I still have gray, thinning hair, and I'm still battling the bulge of middle-age, but I appreciate my body that works, and thank God often for such a remarkable treasure.

It isn't uncommon, however, to pretty much ignore one's physical nature until suddenly there is pain because something has gone wrong. For instance, from time to time I have gout attacks. They are excruciatingly painful, and when I'm in the throes of an attack, I think about my foot a lot, especially the big toe on that foot.

When my toes or other parts of my body become pain-filled, my attention is riveted on the pain. I waste no time in begging God to consider easing the torment.

On the other hand, when I have been gout-free—pain-free—my toes, my feet, and other joints have been virtually ignored, and barely seen as anything special.

They have just been there.

Pondering Kushner's words, I can't be nonchalant about the gift of my body, a body that works fabulously well, and is pain-free most of the time.

"Gratitude does not come naturally to most people," notes Kushner. "We tend to assume we are entitled to all good things in life just for being the nice people we are."

It takes only a few seconds to thank God first thing every day for a mind that works and body that works. For me it is a way to celebrate life and celebrate the wondrous gifts that he has given me for a lifetime. I have a body and a mind that work—not necessarily painlessly, or perfectly—but precisely as he designed them specifically for me.

Our Inability to Cope



Arthur LeClair

Jean Vanier is one of the great and wise spiritual leaders in the world today. He is the founder of L'Arche, an international community of people living with the mentally handicapped in love and service. Vanier knows the poor and weak. He has centered his whole life and the life of L'Arche around the Beatitudes. He says the only way to live with sanity today is to enter into the simplicity of the Beatitudes given to us by Jesus in Matthew 5.

Recently, in commenting on the first Beatitude, ("Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.") Vanier said that what this means is becoming aware of our "inability to cope" and owning that feeling so that we might open ourselves to a higher power, the wisdom of God that is offered to each of us. At first reading I didn't want to accept what Vanier was saying. None of us is comfortable facing "our inability to cope," especially in our culture where coping, and even going beyond coping, is the name of the game. But anyone who is growing in spiritual wisdom will reach the point where they begin to realize "our inability to cope." We like to think we have control, and we try to reach for more and more control, no matter what stress it causes. Realizing "our inability to cope," we are faced with a crossroads.

Arthur LeClair directs the Spiritual Life Center in Englewood, Colorado.

Either we panic and try harder to maintain control, or we accept “our inability to cope” and ask the Lord to provide us with the next step.

I was talking to an elderly person recently who was facing the issue of a nursing home. He didn’t mind going to the nursing home—it was the feeling that he wasn’t able to cope anymore that made him feel inadequate. I urged him not to fight the feeling, to accept his “inability to cope.” I was really asking him to become dependent on and trust the Lord in a deep and radical way.

It’s what we are all asked to do. But we live in a culture that is so opposed to this that it is difficult to accept the wisdom of the gospel. If we can’t cope, we cover it up and devise ways of appearing that we are coping. This is the road to despair.

When we accept our limitations and allow God to fill in the pieces and trust that he will do it, then life becomes simpler, cleaner.

Whether it be at work or in the process of aging, or fighting some addiction, the wise person is the one who becomes aware of “our inability to cope.” What Jesus is asking us to consider in the first Beatitude is to own that feeling, not to run away from it; not to fake it; not to pretend. It might feel like our whole insides are being wrenched out, but it is important to stay with the awareness of “our inability to cope.”

In a wonderful paradox, this awareness actually opens us to God’s intervention. We need to reach the end of our rope, then we discover that God is there waiting for us. It is a holy, powerful moment!

The sorry point is that so many people try to run away from this moment. It’s the last thing we want to face. We keep putting it off in a thousand ways; and so we turn away from a precious grace in our lives.

Christel Fuchs Holzer

Photos and text by Janet Lundskog



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Christel holding a plaque awarded to her by Physicians for Social Responsibility.

ONE SACRED JOURNEY



A Photo Essay

Christel Fuchs Holzer, a life-long Quaker and pacifist, was born in Russelsheim/Main, Germany on July 22, 1913. She is a beautiful woman, gentle in manner and speech, but very strong in her convictions and willing to act on them. The beauty that is seen in her photographs is but an outward sign of her greater inner beauty and courage. This is her story told to me when I photographed Christel just a few months ago:

In 1933, I was studying psychology in Switzerland under Carl Jung; I didn't like him because he was telling me about his dreams and here was Germany going up in flames. He said that psychology had nothing to do with politics! Because I was homesick, I went back to Germany. My father was in prison for speaking out against Hitler; my mother had committed suicide.*

I continued my studies and earned a master's degree at the University of Halle. When I walked up the steps to get my degree, there was a big swastika on the flag at the back of the platform. As I walked across the platform, I knew I could not salute it. My arm was too heavy! They refused then to give me the degree.

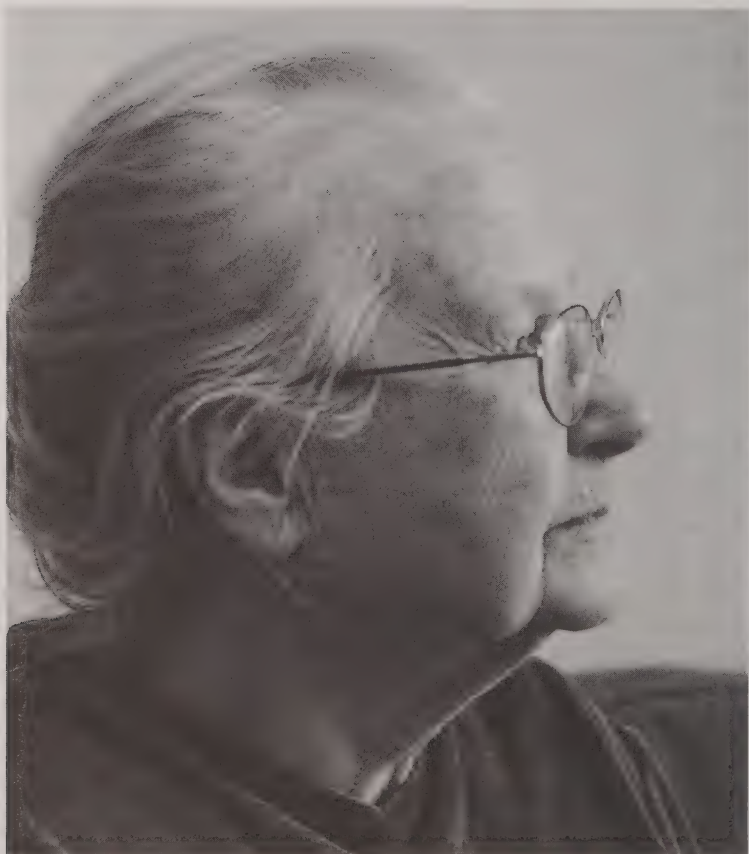
Janet Lundskog, Ph.D., did her graduate work in historical theology, primarily focused on Judaism, Jewish-Christian relations, and Holocaust studies. Now retired in Vermont, she is involved in peace activism and fine art photography.

** Christel's father, Emil Fuchs (1874-1971), was the first Lutheran pastor to join the Social Democratic Party in Germany after World War I and a pacifist. In 1925, he joined the Society of Friends. Before being imprisoned by the Nazis, he was a Professor of Religious Science at Kiel. After the war he, too, came to America and taught in the U.S.*

As I stepped down from the platform, I knew I had to leave Germany. I walked to the back door where my uncle met me, gave me some money and told me I must get away. With my bike, I hitchhiked to Kiel and then took a ship to New York City in 1937.

At the time Christel showed this tremendous act of courage in her refusal to salute a Nazi flag, she was just twenty-three years old.

After Christel arrived in the United States, she taught at a school for international training where she met the



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man who became her husband, Albert Holzer (now deceased). Together they had five children.

In 1962, Christel moved to Putney, Vermont to be near her daughter, Maryanna, who was living in Burlington. Christel volunteered in school libraries in Putney and Brattleboro, but even though she held a Master's of Education from a German university, she had to take summer courses to qualify as a school librarian in Vermont. She has served on many committees of the American Friends Service Committee (AFCS) in Cambridge, MA and in Vermont, and, like her mother before her, she is a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Christel's current interests and concerns include the environment, global warming, poverty, land trusts, the anti-nuclear/peace movement in Vermont and the world's abundance of nuclear weapons. When asked what is the one thing she'd like to do that is still undone, she answered strongly, "Get rid of **ALL** nuclear weapons."

In response to the question regarding the influences on her thinking, life choices, etc., she said that when she was growing up, she didn't know that she could choose; she realized that much later.

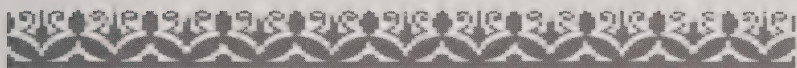
But while I was growing up I would rush home to read the papers and read about the salt marches that Gandhi led—Gandhi was a major influence. I read many books in my father's study even though he said I wouldn't understand them. I read Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and others. I read and learned Das Kapital when I was just in my teens—probably as young as thirteen years old.

Today, at age eighty-nine, Christel lives in Burlington, Vermont. Her favorite recreational/cultural activities are going to the Flynndog gallery to view the art shows there, gardening, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at the Intervale Community Farm, and Bookbinding through Witness for Peace in Nicaragua. She is still a member of the Quaker meeting in Putney.

And her activism continues. She has been marching and protesting at anti-war and other demonstrations and rallies held this past year in Burlington, and she undoubtedly will continue to join other peace activists so long as she is able to do so.

I asked her how she wishes to be remembered. She answered, "As having empathy." She has truly earned this modest tribute. Christel is a model for living a life in the service of peace and expressing concern for the world and for all who inhabit that world by the actions we take, not just the words we speak.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



Of Blindness and Light

Mercedes Rojo

He made his way slowly with his cane, pedestrians hurrying past him with no care or concern for his safety. The pavement had been uneven for most of the winter. Now it was mid-summer and the work was not yet finished. I wanted to help him, not knowing whether he would welcome my help, so I just stayed close, ready, in case he would need me. Did he sense my presence and my concern? I don't know, but as we were ready to cross the street, he turned his face toward me and in a halting voice said, "Is it okay to cross the street now?" I reached out and held his arm, "Yes, it is okay," I replied. He turned his face to me again, "I need to cross the other way, too. I'm going to the Wawa." I told him that I was going that way myself, and we continued together.



Sr. Mercedes Rojo, OSF, is a spiritual director and retreat facilitator. She lectures and writes on prayer and spirituality and is currently a member of the renewal and evangelization team of the Philadelphia archdiocese.

As we said good-bye, something in his kind face and soft voice touched my heart deeply. How could I begin to explain it? It was a moment that lasted an eternity. And in that moment, my eyes overflowing with tears, I was filled with so much gratitude for so much I take for granted. I looked up at the bright sky speckled with white clouds, and at the people around me, marveling at the beauty of faces and colors—a wonderful sight this blind man could not see. I was at once grateful for my gift of sight and so very sorry that this man could not share it. He could not see the colors or the faces, he could not even see enough to walk safely across the street. And yet, he was not bitter, his voice and his face told me that. In his simplicity and humble request, he had given me a precious gift; like Moses long ago, I felt I was walking on holy ground. “Thank you, God,” I prayed. “Thank you for this moment of grace and light. Thank you for the awareness of your gifts so often taken for granted and thank you for the gift of the simplicity this man has given me. Bless him. Be with him. Guide his steps. Help him be safe.”

I continued on my way back to my office, not wanting this moment to end. As I waited for one more light to change, I was aware of another gift I had received. In his simplicity, this man had shown me that there is no shame in asking for help. I could say that I already knew this and most of the time I don’t have any difficulty in asking for the help I need. But there are times when something seems just too simple to admit my need—like crossing the street. As I continued walking, I asked for the grace of simplicity and humility to recognize my own blindness and to know when I need someone to help me in those “street crossings” I may find difficult. I prayed that I might be able to do it as naturally as this blind man.

God must have heard my prayers for in the days that followed, the theme of blindness and light was a constant in my daily prayer. I became aware of parts of me I often keep tucked away in the dark wishing they were not there, of issues I choose to ignore because dealing with them will force me to change the way I think or act, or the inability to accept that I cannot be in control all the time.

This blind man must have accepted his own blindness and the risks it involved to venture out into the street. Fear of confronting the dangers out there would have kept him trapped inside his house. He did what he needed to do: Go out, guide himself carefully with his cane, and ask for help when he felt he couldn't do it alone. I, too, need to accept my blind spots before being able to manage my own "street crossings." This past week, as I began to make my way slowly along the uneven pavements of my daily living, I wasn't too surprised at the many potholes I found there. I trip on them all too often to doubt their existence. The newfound grace (the light) was being newly amazed at the blessing I always receive when I dare to name and own them as mine. Accepting their reality, and the barriers I manufacture so as not to face them, is for me the cane that guides me safely across the street.

*I felt
gratitude
for many things
I often take for
granted.*

And there is more. As I continue to accept those hidden parts of myself, a humbler, truer part of me comes to light: Someone rooted in the reality of who I am with all the good and not-so-good in me. This humility, the gift of my blindness, gives me the courage to continue venturing out into the unknown and guides me through the potholes and uneven streets of life's transformation process. God's

holy ground may be uneven and at times filled with pot-holes, but oh, how good it is to walk on it with God's light shining in my heart.

What a wonderful gift this blind man gave me! I did not ask his name, but God knows it. For me he will always be the blind man who filled my heart with light and gave me the courage to face my own blindness. I pray that God will bless him daily and that he may always find friendly guides along the way.

ILLUMINATIONS



God becomes flesh in us, in all of us—not just in the good and beautiful and whole, but in the messy and broken as well.

~ Mercedes Rojo

Our minds are perpetually shifting in and out of confusion and clarity. If only we were confused all the time, that would at least make for some kind of clarity.

~ Sogyal Rinpoche

A vital faith is more like an organism or a work of art than it is like a cafeteria tray.

~ Huston Smith

If all our misfortunes were laid in one common heap whence everyone must take an equal portion, most people would be contented to take their own and depart.

~ Socrates

There's no spiritual occupation. Spirit is what we bring to the occupation.

~ Dan Millman

To be rewarded for doing good is to rob goodness of any moral quality. It then becomes good business. It pays to be good. Morality is not a commercial enterprise.

~ Rabbi Levi A. Olan

The eyes that regard God are also the eyes through which God regards the world.

~ *Traditional Sufi Saying*

A Hasid asked his Rebbe, "How can I best serve God?" expecting to hear a profound and esoteric answer. The Rebbe replied, "One can best serve God with whatever one is doing at the moment."

~ *Hasidic Teaching*

If the soul could have known God without the world, the world would never have been created.

~ *Meister Eckhart*

Live at the empty heart of paradox.
I'll dance with you there, cheek to cheek.

~ *Rumi*

Know well what leads you forward and what holds you back, and choose the path that leads to wisdom.

~ *Buddha*

In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: It goes on!

~ *Robert Frost*

My life is my message.

~ *Mahatma Gandhi*

PILGRIMAGE



Let Your Wounds Carry You into the Heart of God

Gaylord Hageseth

I did not know it, but I was called into the great Silence by the One who has no voice, and touched by the One who has no hands.

I arrived at Saint Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas on a Sunday afternoon when the temperature was 105 degrees. The state was in a drought. Even the creek beds were cracked and parched. I came with both hope and anxiety, wondering if the monastic community had anything to say to me. I felt summoned to come and sit at the feet of Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine sister, and hoped that I could get some living water for my Secret Garden.

Macrina's prayer moved me:

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ
give you a spirit of wisdom and insight
that you may see clearly
into the garden of your life.

Gaylord Hageseth is Professor of Physics at the Univeristy of North Carolina, Greensboro and an elder in the Presbyterian Church, USA.

May your innermost eyes be enlightened
that you might touch the mysteries of God.
May you know the great hope
to which you are called.
And may you come to understand
that the same power
that raised Jesus from the dead
Dwells in the SECRET GARDEN of your heart.

I was expecting to meditate in silence a few hours a day but Macrina said the entire weeklong retreat would be in silence. She would present a meditation for us one hour in the morning and another hour in the evening. We were not to speak to each other. We could have dinner with conversation only on Thursday and Friday.

I went into silence and was fine for the first two hours . . . but after two days I was in inner chaos. I wanted to flee and go home. This certainly was not in my Protestant tradition.

I went to Macrina and told her I was drawn to sit at her feet and learn from her wisdom; but I was not suited to be a monastic, not even for one week.

She responded, "Oh, please stay in the silence. If you do, you will find a Gift. I bow to the sacred One who dwells within you. I know this is your first time in the Great Silence, but the path to the holy One is through the hurricane of your wounds. You must embrace your wounds of guilt and resentment. Dialogue with the Silence and learn from your sorrow. You will see joy come when you no longer repress and deny your brokenness. It is the pathway to God. Please be gentle with yourself. You know you are created in the image of the living God and you are a precious and a unique being

in His sight. He loves you totally and unconditionally. You are a dwelling place for the Source of all Life. You are an offspring of the One who said, 'I am who am.' If the One who gave you birth lives within you, surely you can find some resources there in your sacred Center. An Expert lives within you. An Expert breathes out of you. Are you able to be still enough to become intimate with the One who lives within? This is the only expert you will ever meet. Remember you are splendor."

"But Macrina, old resentments have surfaced that I thought were healed years ago. I don't want to look at them again." Macrina replied,

"Welcome the resentments that stand before you, resentments that you thought had lost their hold over you. Some of your wounds may be so deep and the grief is so strong that they may never heal 100 percent, but the Wounded Healer will heal you enough so that they can teach you. Sit down and listen to their story.

They need to be understood. Perhaps your caregivers did not meet your need. But they probably did the best they could. You see, they also had an inner pain that prevented them from meeting your needs, and we can forgive them when we understand their pain. When you realize you are under the eye of God, you will be able to embrace all of the garbage that has been pushed underground . . . the shame and guilt, the sins, the resentments, and the fears of your entire life. Reach out and touch them all and hold them as you would a frightened child. Accept them as part of the story of your life. In time you will feel beautiful and whole.

*After
two days
of silence,
I was in
inner chaos.*

"Your mind is like a river. Watch the boats float by, but don't get on. In time the clutter and chaos will cease and you will be empty. Give these wounds, that seem to be curses, to the Indwelling One. This emptiness is a gift. Embrace the darkness and accept it as a teacher. Then you will be filled with the love and peace that passes understanding. You see, the guilt of your sin shows you your need for God. Accept each one and say yes, this is me without the gift of Grace. You know that the gift of Grace is free, but it is not cheap. It is hard to accept. Our society teaches us we must earn everything. All that is required to experience the gift of Grace is a contrite heart and the offering of your holy screams as a gift to God. It takes time to heal. Please be patient with yourself. When you are touched by the holy Mystery you will no longer need dogma, for you will have found the Source of all life. All things are made new and you will be as a newborn child *trailing clouds of glory*. And we learn it is not what we are or what we have been in the past that is important, but what we desire to be in the future. We are acceptable, warts and all. Your commitment to the loving Mystery within gives a joy and peace that passes understanding. It gives you a reason to live and a reason to die."

"But how do I get there?" I asked. "Do not struggle and strive! You don't get there. The Kingdom is within. Let all of your guilt and resentment go. These are gifts that you can give to God, and they will bless you. Let the holy winds toss you to and fro. Do not fight them. After a while you will be carried into the calm of the eye of God."

On the third day the temperature went to 114 degrees. But then the wind came, uprooting trees and breaking branches. If the trees could be just a little more flexible they would not break. They should bend with the wind.



Tom Dunham

Perhaps this is a message for me?

The calm, still, and blessed rain fell softly and tenderly. My secret garden was coming back to life. I was in the Center of the eye of God. All doubt vanished and I knew the true Reality. He speaks to the depth of my being. I am a word that is meant to respond to Him. There is a deep resonance in my innermost heart of hearts. I lose my separate voice and respond to the will of the Spirit of silence. I am but a weak echo of His Love.

On the seventh day I was in the silence and did not want to leave. I know what eternity is and I've had a touch of heaven. Macrina told me I was to take up my mat and go home. "Go and tell your story so that those seekers in Greensboro who wish to walk in the footsteps of Christ know that the loving Spirit lives in their own secret garden."

Surely, Yahweh was in this place and I did not know it.

Lessons Learned at the Monastery

1. Embracing brokenness and looking at pain, guilt, and resentment is necessary if we are to be able to let go and release our negative feelings. Embrace the wounds one at a time but do not cling to them. Each of our minds is like a river. Welcome all arrivals and let them go one at a time. After much time the mind will be empty and at peace. Each of us may get to a point where we forget our self, and see the ones who have hurt us with the loving eyes of God. We will begin to understand that they also have to deal with their own brokenness. This is the beginning of divine empathy and understanding.

2. We give our brokenness as a gift to the Holy One who dwells deep within our unconscious. In time we are made whole.

3. We are then free to live our lives under the blessing rather than the curse.

It does not matter what happens to us but rather how we handle what happens to us. Every one of us is broken, but we are not left alone. We know experientially our need and God's action. Our Comforter heals our brokenness. Some brokenness is never totally healed but the scars are a gift that we can show to others. We are given to the world.

PRAYERS



A Prayer for Everyday

Alice O. Howell

All through this day, O Dear One
let me touch as many lives as possible for Thee
and every life I touch
do Thou by Thy Holy Spirit
quicken
whether through
the words I speak
the words I write
the life I lead
or the prayer I breathe!
In the name of my Teachers, Amen.

Alice O. Howell is author of The Dove in the Stone and The Beejum Book. She lives in Massachusetts.

May My Prayer Be Beautiful

Chinook Psalter

The garden is rich with diversity
with plants of a hundred families
In the space between the trees
With all the colors and fragrances
Basil, mint and lavender.
God keep my remembrance pure,
Raspberry, Apple, Rose,
God fill my heart with love,
Dill, anise, tansy,
Holy winds blow in me.
Rhododendron, zinnia,
May my prayer be beautiful
May my remembrance O God be as incense to thee
In the sacred grove of eternity
As I smell and remember
The ancient forests of earth.

From The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Personal Prayer from the World's Spiritual Traditions.

WAYS OF PRAYER



Spirit Expressions

Alanna Eckert

Each morning my day begins with a ritual. I go to my rocking chair with a cup of cappuccino—topped with whipped cream—and turn on my table fountain, light a candle, sit down, take a deep breath, and take out my journal. I write the day, date, and time; then I wait for the words to begin to flow.

Sometimes I will take a quote from a daily meditation book, (*A Deep Breath of Life* by Alan Cohen is one of my favorites) and write how the meditation relates to me. Often I begin by writing about how I am feeling and what is of concern to me in that moment. Often I never know what I will write about until I begin. But once I begin, the words just seem to flow across the page as I write with abandon, knowing all of my thoughts are private, not intended for anyone's eyes but my own.

Going back to previous journals (there are currently 138), it is clear that I have changed, matured, or what I best like to describe as having evolved to a higher place of consciousness, particularly over the past ten years.

Alanna Eckert is a legal secretary for a major law firm in Chicago. She is a classical pianist and continues to study with the same teacher she has been studying with since 1974. Alanna also likes to paint and believes every creative activity is a form of sacred self-expression and sacred play. She lives in Bolingbrook, Illinois.

My journals are the only place I can honestly express myself and see my truth written there for me to read and not fear. I discovered the difference between ego and spirit, unloved inner child and loving adult. (*Healing Your Aloneness* by Erica Chopich and Margaret Paul helped me learn this.) I wrote dialogue between loved and unloved inner child and unloving and loving adult. Once seen on the pages, I began to understand my own consciousness.

I attended a journal workshop by Christina Baldwin and began a journal with drawings and poetry, using Soul Cards to go deeper into myself. I had no idea so much spirituality was there.

Journaling helped me to see many sides of a situation, the choices I have about what I feel, and helped me find productive options to many conflicts in my life with professional and personal relationships. It became my means of meditation and making conscious contact with the God of my understanding.

I cannot imagine how I could have gotten through so many dark nights of the soul without hours of journaling while listening to soft music in the background. (Nakai Native American flute is my favorite.) Journaling is my source for healing. It is what I do when tears begin to well. It is what I do when I buy into despair. Journaling is my way through the darkness. But it is also where I express joy and gratitude so that I do not forget they have also been mine. Reading entries I wrote when I was happy affirm that I am not always in darkness and bring me to the light of understanding through journaling.

When I am finished, I gently blow out the candle with a whisper—"Peace"—for me and everyone. I never fail to find peace in that moment.

BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED



Watch and Pray: Christian Teachings on the Practice of Prayer. Edited by Lorraine Kisly. Introduction by Bishop Seraphim Sigrist, Bell Tower, 2002. Reviewed by Maryanne Hannan.

The 17th Century English contemplative and cleric William Law wrote “God has but one design or intent towards all mankind and that is to introduce or generate His own life, light and Spirit in them.” *Ordinary Graces: Christian Teachings on the Interior Life* and *Watch and Pray: Christian Teachings on the Practice of Prayer*, both edited by Lorraine Kisly, are such profound compilations of Christian thought that, purely and simply, they must be part of God’s design for humankind.

Both books are organized by cycles, each beginning with the most easily understood material, and move toward the advanced. Divided into ten cycles, *Ordinary Graces* focuses on elements of the interior life. The second volume, *Watch and Pray*, focuses on prayer.

A founding publisher of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* and a former editor of *Parabola: Myth, Tradition, and the Search for Meaning*, Kisly has a gift for matters spiritual. In the introduction, she notes that in choosing the selections, she has made no attempt to be “comprehensive or even representative.” I expected to see large gaps, but did not. Best of all, it seemed there was no hidden agenda, just a real and spontaneous enjoyment of and respect for the Christian path and the spiritual masters of that tradition.

Maryanne Hannan is a poet living in upstate New York.

There is a marvelous range of material, representing Christian thinkers from the earliest times to the present, without regard to denominational differences. Some of the passages are narrative, some, intentionally didactic, others, lyrical outpourings of spirit. There are well-known voices, but also many unfamiliar ones. Thanks to the clear acknowledgment sections at the end of the books, readers can follow up interesting sources. Especially welcome are many passages from Eastern Orthodox writers.

While the writers reflect on specific prayers, including the Book of Hours, the Jesus Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and discuss meditation, contemplation, and *lectio divina* (spiritual reading), there is unanimous agreement that prayer is not a matter of technique or performance, but a response to God who summons us. As the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton writes in the first volume, "We already have everything, but we don't know it, and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we possess." When all is said and done, the English Benedictine John Chapman of the last century offers some practical advice: The only way to pray is to pray; and the way to pray well is to pray much." God will figure out the rest.

I first read these books straight through from beginning to end. Rather than being overwhelmed by such dense material, I felt buoyed by the experience. These writers, my spiritual forebears, are really the Communion of Saints, such as I believe in, but rarely take comfort in. As I read their words, a deep loneliness that I am usually unaware of lifted. This was a moving, and unexpected, experience

Since then, I have returned frequently to the books, randomly picking and choosing passages, both the ones I initially dog-eared and new ones I especially like.

I will not soon tire of these books.

P O E T R Y



Mourning Shower

Hazel Smith Hutchinson

disrobe from outer
trappings of past pain
abuse shame
yours theirs ours

enrobe in warm rain of
waterflow
immerse in
ritual stream

baptize
lay hands on
body mind soul

allow moistening melting
mood to give way to
inner storms inexhaustibly
rich in grace

Hazel Smith Hutchinson is a recipient of a Salina Arts and Humanities Horizon's Grant for Developing Artists. Her poetry has appeared in SNARK, The Heron Quarterly of Haiku and Zen Poetry, and The Aureorean. She lives in Kansas.

with eyes bathed in tears for oneself
let tears of grief groan
let tears of rage riot forth
let tears be

in waterfall relinquishment
let tears of empathy trickle forth
let tears of sympathy flow
let tears of compassion come

in holy water mercy
encounter exoneration
sense reconciliation
awaken to emancipation

bless each teardrop
for its healing power.
be resurrected
dance in morning dew

Into this Prayer Bowl

Chet Corey

Into this prayer bowl
of my hands,
out of which in childhood
I drank pump water,
clear & cold,
as though they formed
one unbroken cup,
& brought it to my face
to spring it alive—
into this beggar's bowl
of my hands, earth-dried
& worked to hardness,
pour your reply,
clear as well water,
& break open
my torpid prayer.
Into this empty bowl
of my becoming,
O Lord,
the alms of your mercy.

Chet Corey is a Covenant Affiliate of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (La Crosse, WI). His poetry has most recently appeared in A New Song, The Chord, and Windhover.



SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



Retreats at Gonzaga

Nancy Rocereto

At the age of fifty-two, I experienced a weekend-long “touched by God” experience at my daughter’s wedding. It was so love-infused, almost ethereal, that it defied any verbal attempt to explain this incredible spiritual encounter. Before this, I had become lukewarm in my catholic faith, then disillusioned as I felt I lost God. I began searching in my own desert wasteland. I realized when God “found” me that weekend, that I had been the one lost. This experience awakened in me a zeal that felt like a conversion. For the next few years, special people popped up in my life, transforming books fell off bookshelves into my hands, and events propelled me along a path of awareness and thirst for more. I found a spiritual director to help guide me in this journey. A casual reference by her about a retreat center in Massachusettes stirred a strong spirit urging in me to explore it further. That brought me to my first eight-day silent retreat ever, held at a retreat center called Gonzaga or Eastern Point Retreat Center.

Nancy Rocereto is a retired clinical social worker. She has been married to her husband, Tom, for thirty-five years. They have four children and two grandchildren.

During the first retreat I made at Gonzaga, an idyllic spot by the sea, I deeply experienced God's love. The sun shone brighter, the butterflies swooped with more grace, the sunrises and sunsets watercolored the skies in magnificent tones and hues. The retreat center sat on a peninsula bordered by bay and ocean that hummed with the vibrations of God's love. I came to Gonzaga to meet God and found evidence everywhere: at the ocean's edge, in the vibrant wild flowers, in meditation, in scripture. My spiritual director there sagely suggested scripture verses which immersed me in God's benevolence.

I felt wrapped in God's embrace; every sensory and emotional encounter heightened by love. I sobbed tears of relief and gratitude upon reflecting on the passage of the woman at the well. I gulped in the living water of God's love and it poured out onto my parched soul.

When I returned to Gonzaga the second year, I told myself not to compare this retreat to the previous year's experience. I wanted to make this experience God's unique gift to me. When asked by this year's director what I wanted from this retreat, I replied, "To go deeper," unsure what that even meant. God didn't let me down. I again awoke to sumptuous sunrises and watched in awe as the sunsets dabbled the sky a blaze of colors. Fulfilling the old adage, "Be careful what you ask for," God did invite me to go deeper. I found myself revisiting wounds I thought had long been healed. Old feelings of despair and unworthiness surfaced as I struggled for several days to make sense of what felt like a downward spiral.

That year's spiritual director, another apt match, encouraged me to reflect on the woman in scripture who hemorrhaged for twelve years. With a heavy heart, I sat on the lawn of this place and opened my heart to God's

message. With an incredible clarity, I realized that for a long period of my life, in fact about twelve years, I also hemorrhaged, only instead of blood, I had a continual flow of anxiety and depression. Reaching up to Christ's "garment," I surrendered my pain, spoke my own truth and asked to be healed. I felt deep plates of emotion shift within. Relief and peace poured through me.

The rest of my stay, no matter where I went, I found reminders of God's love. At the cove, I found sea grass next to my beach chair. Instead of the multiple clumps of oval buds, there were two perfect hearts held together by a blade of grass. On the beach at the bay that night, I picked up one stone after another that was heart-shaped. I gave several to my spiritual director. She was as amazed as I to see these near perfect formations. I basked with delight in my child-like "show and tell." I took several home to share with my husband and children, keeping the last few on my prayer table to be a talisman of God's magical love, lest I forget.

This year, the third, I arrived for my retreat totally open, anxious, and excited to find out what God had in store for me. I again prayed to go deeper. This year's spiritual director suggested four twenty- minute segments of prayer a day, the remainder of the time for rest and relaxation. As the first day wore on, then the second, the third, the fourth, I felt nothing. The magic was gone. The glow wasn't there, everything felt vacuous. Even the smells of the sea and air seemed bleached as I queried God, "Where did you go?"

During my first two retreats, I had written voluminously. Pages and pages of reflections and poetry poured out as if I needed the release to ameliorate the profusion of feeling. This time I had only a few languid

paragraphs. Even the sunrise seemed banal. I couldn't imagine what was happening. The suggested scripture passages seemed remote, my prayer dry and barren. Still, the director encouraged me to continue the pattern of prayer. Interestingly enough, I felt no anxiety nor negativity, just emptiness.

On the morning of the fifth day, I awoke in time for the sunrise, a habit that only happened here at Gonzaga. After yet another sunrise that felt dull, I decided to go to chapel to pray, just to get it over with. Since it was very early I had this quiet, cozy place to myself. I sighed deeply, closed my eyes, and felt the emptiness inside.

I felt total stillness, yet I was very aware. I "heard" a voice say, "Come to me, Nancy." It wasn't from without, but from within. I felt light-filled and weightless, drawn down deeper by a thin filament, yet with no discernable motion. I felt full of peace and serenity. There was no fear; it was very complete. It seemed as if all my questions were answered while at the same time there seemed no need for my usual endless queries. I felt I completely understood the lack of needing to "do" to please God; it really was all about "being." Only this union mattered. It was a place of total peace and love and I was very reluctant to leave.

Of course, I wondered if I had somehow made this happen. Despite all the mini-miracles in my life, this felt too strange. The clinical social worker in me explored all the ways of manipulation. The only thing I couldn't figure out was, if I caused this somehow, HOW did I do it? With some trepidation I tried to explain this to the spiritual director. He never batted an eye. He suggested I trust the experience—and God; that perhaps I needed to be emptied out before God could slip in. I thought about my usual hectic life and how my busy mind is always so bombarded by stimulation.

Even the euphoria from the earlier retreats prevented a void for God to enter in this special way.

I approached my next scheduled prayer time with some misgiving. Closing my eyes, I again chanted my chosen sacred word, "God." Almost immediately "something" happened again. One part of me felt that same hyper-awareness. I could clearly hear all the sounds around me. The other part was very deep, very relaxed. At one point as I chanted, I heard "Here I am." This time I also experienced great joy. It felt as if that deep part of me was also rejoicing, somersaulting, and dancing with the divine. The intimacy felt very deep. I became convinced this was as real as anything else I had ever experienced. I told God if it never happened again, it would be all right. This special encounter was now an intimate part of me.

I did not experience that level of union with God again during the last two days. My spiritual director suggested not to "cling" to the experience but instead, to recognize that it was all gift. God was in charge.

As I look back over these three retreats, I am awed by the God of surprises. The first year I was still early in my "new" conversion and needed all the accouterments a budding love affair requires. And God provided. The second year, God took me deeper and allowed me to experience the healing of old emotional scars, while still buttressing me with love. The third year, on an even more intimate level, God demonstrated that when I empty myself I create room for spiritual union. God showed me that this connection is beyond words.

For the first fifty years of my life I looked for God outside myself, I prayed to a God "up there." Today, I know God is truly everywhere, but most of all deep within each one of us.

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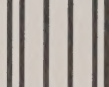
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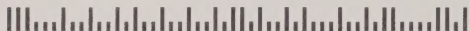
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291 Witherspoon Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227
Phone: 609-924-6863
Fax: 609-924-6910
Website: www.sacredjourney.org
E-mail: editorial@sacredjourney.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Paul Walsh

EDITOR

Rebecca Laird

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR

Cecilia F. Rousseau

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Laurel Masten Cantor

PRODUCTION MANAGER

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